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Ryan, J. C. (2011). Anthoethnography: Emerging research into the culture of flora, aesthetic experience of plants, and the wildflower tourism of the future. *New Scholar*, 1(1), 28-40. Available [here](#)

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# Anthoethnography: Emerging Research into the Culture of Flora, Aesthetic Experience of Plants, and the Wildflower Tourism of the Future

**John Ryan**

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## INTRODUCTION TO ANTHOETHNOGRAPHY

We were travelling up north and up towards the north and around the Murchison River area, and I came across all these tiny little orchids about ten centimetres high. They were in a mass, just a mass of them...for some reason they just grabbed me and I thought 'wow, these are amazing!'

—Wildflower enthusiast Lyn Alcock, Spring 2009, recalling her first sighting of orchids.

As agents of healing, purveyors of ornamentation, symbols of inspiration, inciters of attraction, and repositories of beauty, flowers hold special roles in human societies worldwide (for example, see Goody). Engineered into hybrids and raised in greenhouses, cultivated flowers have particular affinities with people as common members of domesticated spheres. For example, in seventeenth-century Holland, the over-zealous love of flowers galvanised the social and economic furore over tulip flowers and bulbs known as 'tulipmania' (Goldgar 7). In contrast, wild-growing flowers invoke the non-cultivated natural world. By governing their own biological stabilities, wildflowers can appeal to us through their undomesticated beauty and ecological resilience.

The 'culture of flowers' points to the intricate aesthetic, spiritual, artistic, mercantile, economic, symbolic, material and therapeutic relationships between human societies and wild-growing or cultivated flowers. In its general sense, the phrase indicates an interface between the broad categories of nature and culture, people and landscapes, flowers and appreciators (see Giblett 1-23). In nineteenth-century Europe, the '*culte des fleurs*' invigorated a 'new flower rhetoric' within French literature, highlighting the importance of flowers to cultural expression (Knight 3). Indeed, the social anthropologist Jack Goody questions whether the culture of flowers portends a universal 'interest in the natural world that in some form is found in all human societies' or whether it is an affinity with flowers specific to certain cultures (1).

Whereas empirical methods for studying native plants are well established as botanical science, humanities-based

approaches for researching the cultural aspects surrounding wildflowers are less defined. As an emerging area of scholarship bringing the perspectives of cultural studies to the study of the natural world, 'anthoethnography' applies humanities-based approaches to plants and the cultures of flora. Such scholarship is in need. Despite the increase in the scientific knowledge and international awareness of the native flora of the Southwest of Western Australia, for example, relatively little has been researched about commonplace engagements between wildflowers and people throughout the region. So, while the classification of flora grows along specialist lines, the cultural poetics of wildflowers, as well as native flora out-of-flower, remain undeveloped.

In the context of the Southwest, I therefore propose the term 'anthoethnography' as an emerging concept and methodology for researching the complex relationships between people and flora. The medieval Greek prefix 'antho' is a linguistic link between flowers, culture, history and science. Denoting a collection of literary pieces, the word 'anthology' literally means 'flower gathering.' Moreover, an obscure term, 'anthography' is the anatomical description of flowers, used in Russell Grimwade's study of eucalypt flowers, *An Anthography of the Eucalypts*. Hence, anthoethnography is the use of ethnographic approaches, especially semi-structured interviews and participant observation, for producing accounts about the embodied interactions and interdependencies between human cultures and flowering plants. Applied to the Southwest culture of flora, the approach aims to bring to light the diverse

intersections between settler, post-colonial and contemporary societies and wildflowers.

How do both tourists and experts perceive flowering plants? How is wildflower tourism marketed? What kinds of language are exercised to communicate experiences of wildflowers? The Southwest culture of flora will be adumbrated through a reading of the rhetoric of the spring wildflower tourism season. Set within a broader discussion of the history and values of regional wildflower tourism, the reading of anthoethnographic interviews highlights the varieties of cultural intersections with native plants, from distanced visual appreciation to proximal multi-sensory engagement. The interviewees range through a spectrum of novices and experts who provide insight into the Southwest culture of flora through their experiences as tourists or expertise as specialists. Respondents suggest potential directions for wildflower tourism towards proximal interactions with plants in habitats (Bennett), concepts of botanical conservation through scientific understanding (Tinker), and Aboriginal knowledges and spiritualities focussed towards the long-term wellbeing of native plant populations (Nannup).

Aesthetic experience of plants usually means looking at flowers. In its regional manifestations, wildflower tourism tends to emphasise the visual appreciation of plants as affections of sight. Indeed, wildflower tourism may entail expectations of colour, form, scale and profusion focussed on the static appearance of flowers. However, participatory engagement with flora, exemplified by the eating of plants as bush tucker, offers multi-sensory modes of appreciation that build on the experience of seeing. Therefore, anthoethnography draws

theoretically from the critique of pictorialisation, which constructs the natural world as a static two-dimensional landscape.

In the essay 'The age of the world picture,' Martin Heidegger argues that 'the fundamental event of modernity is the conquest of the world as picture' (221). David Levin suggests that Heidegger's later thinking responded to the centrality of 'vision-generated discourse' intrinsic to the emerging visual technologies of modernity (186). Echoing Heidegger, Jonathan Crary observes the linkage between technologies of sight and modernity's production of objective knowledge of the world (25-66). Through the lens of a camera, flowers may be apprehended objectively as a series of images. Owing to the contemporary profusion of image technologies, flower tourism tends to value visual appearances, rather than participatory experiences linked to deeper understandings of plants as nodes in a larger ecological web. The pre-eminence of visual aesthetics may be due to the privileging of sight combined with the protected status of certain wildflowers that prohibits human bodily encounter with plants in conservation areas. Consequently, cultural involvement with flora risks becoming flattened to 'the mediation of presence through images' (Mules 2). However, through the critique of vision-generated discourse at the core of anthoethnography, the culture of flora in the Southwest may be broadened to comprise physical interactions with plants through the multiple senses of smell, touch, taste and hearing augmented by the sense of sight and visual technologies. The guiding conceptual premise of anthoethnography is that vision offers a narrow range for experiencing flora that can

be complemented and broadened by participatory modes of interaction and Aboriginal spiritual traditions of plants.

### *WHAT IS WILDFLOWER TOURISM?*

We try to take [wildflower tourism] that step further than just something that has an aesthetic value, just that physical image on the mind, the "yeah it looks pretty." We add the dimension of how [wildflowers] function, that's very complex.

—Allan Tinker, proprietor of Western Flora Caravan Park, Eneabba, W.A. Spring 2009

Anthoethnography is one methodology for studying the culture of flora. The purpose of wildflower tourism, as a culture of flowers, is the aesthetic appreciation of the visual beauty of flowering plants. In contrast to wildflower tourism, the term 'botanical appreciation' comprises the enjoyment of whole plants, not just their flowers, through multiple sensory faculties such as smell and taste. As a broadly inclusive and popularised culture of flora, wildflower tourism invokes scenes of contemporary self-drive or escorted bus tours into the bush to encounter flowering plants in their habitats. However, wildflower tourism also comprises flower shows and festivals in which native plants are picked, transported, and arranged for display in community and visitor centres, churches, botanical gardens and other cultural epicentres. Indeed, these venues often serve as nerve centres for peripatetic wildflower appreciators. As visually marketed and practiced, as well as linked to motorised transport, wildflower tourism entails a quest for the bloom: colours, forms, symmetries and morphological harmonies. People travel thousands of kilometres to

Western Australia and other distant places to see wildflowers, not necessarily to smell, taste, touch, hear, know deeply or otherwise engage in non-visual, or even spiritual, ways.

Wildflower tourism occurs in such a variety of places worldwide as Namaqua National Park in South Africa (Loubster, Mouton, and Nel), the town of Bohinj in Slovenia ('5<sup>th</sup> International Wildflower Festival') and the state of Florida in the southern United States ('Introduction'). A *Lonely Planet* guide to the United States reports on the centrality of wildflower driving circuits to the tourism of certain American states: 'to Texans, wildflowers are a way of life. Wildflower tourism is so entrenched that the highway visitor centers can help you plan an entire trip around watching them bloom' (Lyon and Nystrom 594). In a study of nature-based tourism in the Central Coast region of Western Australia including Lesueur National Park, Julianna Priskin notes that while 'the flowering plant diversity of Western Australia is a tourism drawcard' wildflower tourism represents 'an unresearched form of nature-based tourism' in the region (518).

As a form of tourism which takes visitors into botanic habitats, wildflower tourism crosses into nature-based tourism, a general category including action-oriented adventure tourism and conservation-minded ecotourism. Nature-based tourism is 'primarily concerned with the direct enjoyment of some relatively undisturbed phenomenon of nature' (Priskin 501). Whereas adventure tourists are characterised by their interest in activities like four-wheel motoring, ecotourists aim to experience the natural world as a whole and to learn about its conservation (Blamey 5-22). Ralf Buckley, Catherine Pickering and David Weaver observe that, in Australian

snow country, 'wildflower appreciation and other forms of ecotourism tend to occur in the summer' (9, emphasis added). However, the assertion that wildflower tourism is automatically a form of ecotourism may be erroneous. Although wildflower tourism crosses into adventure and ecotourism, its parameters are largely not clarified.

Demographically, wildflower tourists tend to be mostly 'older empty nesters' (Western Australian Tourism Commission 8). According to the same study, 'wildflower enthusiasts' are focussed on seeing different species of wildflowers, whereas 'nature lovers' are more independent, interactive, and inclined towards a diverse range of natural and cultural attractions. Hence, wildflower tourists are not intrinsically interested in botanical conservation. For example, the recreational harvesting of wildflowers has had a troubled relationship with the appreciation of native plants. In 1926 a request for the protection of flora and fauna within national parks was rejected by the West Australian Department of Lands and Survey to defend the interests of wildflower gatherers: 'the primary inducement for people to go into reserves...is to gather the wildflowers with the object of adorning their homes and taking part in the wildflower shows' (qtd. in Hall and Page 56).

### *'BREATH OF THE BUSH': THE HISTORY OF WILDFLOWER TOURISM IN THE SOUTHWEST*

Since colonial settlement, Western Australia has been recognised by plant enthusiasts worldwide for the diversity of its flowering species. Nearly half of Australia's twenty-five thousand flowering plants occur

in Western Australia, with the Southwest region containing about 9000 species, three-quarters of which are endemic (Hopper 270). Botanical science continues to identify new species at an unusual rate, including eucalypts such as the Rock Mallee [*Eucalyptus petrensis*] within the outer reaches of metropolitan Perth (Hopper 261). Throughout the region, the profusion of species, combined with the particular adaptive ecologies of the flora, has given rise to a richness and variety of colour and form that allures prospective visitors. Botanically-minded visitors to the region often comment on the tenacity and beauty of the flora, enduring extreme conditions of dryness and heat: 'travelling across the most barren area, suddenly you come across a Stuart Pea [sic] growing out of this red soil...you just can't believe that's come out of this red dust' (Western Australian Tourism Commission 17).

The appreciation of wildflowers is evident in writings from the early years of settlement. Spring walks to Mount Eliza, the present-day site of Kings Park, were important to the social life of colonial Perth residents. In the spring of 1856, Sophia Phillips, the daughter of Surveyor General John Septimus Roe, reported the 'bush lovely with flowers' on a trip to Toodyay (qtd. in Summers 4). In his diary kept between 1877 and 1884, Alfred James Hillman wrote of wildflower jaunts to Mount Eliza during the spring (419). However, Hillman commented that many of the wildflowers lacked a smell: 'they can scarcely be said to waste their sweetness on the desert air as they are for the most part scentless' (424). Moreover, describing her visit to Western Australia in the late nineteenth century, May Vivienne witnessed an explosion of spring

wildflowers and saw not only beautiful forms, but economic potential: 'As the train sped past the idea struck me that these flowers—lovely immortelles, white, pink, and yellow, growing in countless millions—could be turned to good account' (28).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, technological developments afforded greater visual avenues for appreciating the bush. West Australians embraced rail and auto travel because of the distances between locales, and these new forms of transport augmented opportunities for wildflower appreciation through visual speculation. The late 1800s and early 1900s marked the emergence of flower tours by train, departing metropolitan Perth for outlying areas like Gingin and Wongan Hills. 'Wildflower trains' became desirable forms of tourism, providing regular excursions to the bush from urban areas and promoting the Western Australian countryside as an 'Arcadian idyll' (Summers 5). During this period, Emily Pelloe made the following observation:

special "flower trains" are run. These and the usual week-end and holiday trains are always packed with city folk eager to explore the bush and gather the lovely flowers. Glen Forrest (late Smith's Mill), Darlington, Gooseberry Hill, Kalamunda, and Serpentine are all favourite haunts of the flower-seekers. (29)

However, the trains also brought both country dwellers and wildflowers into city environs for wildflower shows. During the late nineteenth century, the Perth Wildflower Show was the central wildflower event, serving as a plenum for the collective botanical diversity of the state. Train transport galvanised the gathering of species from remote areas. A note in *The*

*West Australian* from September 1893 comments on special excursion rates offered by the Railway Department to 'enable country residents to see the floral exhibitions which are to be open, and to spend a few days of the most charming season of the year in the capital and at the seaside' (4). An August 1899 issue of the same paper explains that the committee of the September wildflower show in Perth hoped that flowers 'will be sent from all parts of the colony to them to make the show as representative as possible' (4). The railways transported native plants to Perth committee members at no cost, and the trains became related inseparably to early modes of flower touring. Hence, in the late colonial history of Western Australia, the mode of detached viewership afforded by train travel influenced the perception of native plants as static elements of the visual landscape through which new forms of transport shuttled burgeoning settler populations.

During colonial years, flower shows and other forms of tourism conflicted with values of biodiversity conservation, especially when the picking of wildflowers was held as an acceptable form of embodied appreciation. By the late 1890s, discussions about the fate of Western Australian flora commenced amidst pressures exerted by wildflower collectors on plant populations. By the 1920s, Pelloe extolled the virtues of Southwest wildflowers as the 'breath of the bush' but decried their despoliation at the hand of pickers:

Flowers should ever be regarded as something too beautiful and precious to be wasted...in the city they bring a breath of the bush and recall happy memories to many a tired heart, in the home they add a dainty charm to the rooms, and as a gift to the sick are always welcomed. (16)

The 1912 Native Flora Protection Act was implemented to protect flora from destruction by excursionist pickers, as well as commercial exploitation from flower decorators (Summers 5-8). Moreover, the 1935 Native Protection Act increased the schedule of native species protected from collection (Summers 8-11). Local legislation also began to take place along popular touring routes. For example, Mundaring Weir Road between Mundaring and Kalamunda was constructed as a tourist loop through forested land and became a popular wildflower drive. According to local historian Graeme Rundle, early flora protection legislation in the Hills area outside of Perth was prompted by community concerns about the recreational picking of wildflowers (personal communication 12 August 2010). Further along, in 1953, Government Botanist Charles Gardner reported a rare endemic Mountain Bell, only known to exist on the summit of Coganarup Peak in the Stirling Ranges, at the Kalgoorlie Wildflower Show (Summers 12). Hence, aesthetic appreciation of visible forms and the procurement of wildflowers began to put demands on biodiversity conservation.

During the 1960s, due largely to the personal interest of Premier David Brand, the tourism industry promoted Western Australia with auto license plates bearing the slogan 'The Wildflower State' (Rundle, personal communication 12 August 2010). Presently, the Southwest wildflower season is internationally renowned. The Western Australian Tourism Commission study identifies the state as the best destination for flowers in Australia and among the premier destinations for wildflower tourism worldwide. In one of the few published reports on Western Australian wildflower

tourism, the suggestion for increasing the 'motivational appeal' of the annual *Wildflower Holiday Guide* is to 'focus more on larger photos of expansive, scenic and experiential wildflower imagery' (5). Imagery as a marketing tool is based on the enticement of visual stimulation or the prospect of having an aesthetic experience based on sight. The core value structure of wildflower tourism, as it is marketed in contemporary terms, is visual. Therefore the experience of tourists tends towards seeing flowers and gathering images. To return to a pertinent phrase by Warwick Mules, wildflower imagery is 'the mediation of presence through images' (2). The presence mediated by the images is of living plants in their multi-sensory habitats and in their complexity of relations to other life forms.

Visual affordance from the distance of trains and cars, as well as from behind image-making instruments, can create an objective space between people and plants, reinforcing dualisms between the natural world and the cultural world. The Tourism Commission study further states that many travellers 'often cited previous visually stunning experiences as their motivators for thinking about taking another wildflower holiday' and one participant described with especially strong emotion the sight of a 'carpet of flowers' engulfing a group of visitors (15). The carpet of expansive everlastings is a high expectation of most respondents, who use language like 'variety, colour, and vast expanses' as well as 'carpet of colour' and 'perfectly formed' to describe the wildflowers (Western Australian Tourism Commission 16). According to the respondents, the primary reasons given for the popularity of Southwest wildflower tourism are pictorial and include the vastness of 'untouched' flowers as far as the

eye can see, colour varieties, and contrasts of colours against 'barren' backdrops (Western Australian Tourism Commission). One respondent suggests that more 'bright, colourful, scenic shots with scope and magnitude' be added to improve the *Wildflower Holiday Guide* (Western Australian Tourism Commission 39).

#### *ANTHOETHNOGRAPHY IN PRACTICE: FROM WILDFLOWER TOURISM TO BOTANICAL APPRECIATION*

Beyond wildflower tourism, botanical appreciation suggests engagement with the whole plant (bark, leaves, fruits and seeds) throughout the year, not only during the height of flowering, and through various sense faculties. Pelloe comments that 'all over Western Australia the display of wildflowers is especially extensive in the springtime, but the bush always holds something to interest the collector' (15). In contemporary conservation language, a collector is an appreciator; hence the bush offers something to appreciate at all times of year. However, unlike scientific collectors of the colonial era for whom objective knowledge was a priority, contemporary appreciators are free to draw from a spectrum of appreciative modes including bodily experiences through the practice of eating wild plants (see Clarke 81-90).

Due to their ecological adaptations, especially the general smallness of their foliage and flowers, Southwest plants require forms of proximal appreciation to complement visual spectatorship. Again, Pelloe encourages the flower-seeker to:

turn your back on the view. Otherwise, you will spend a lot of time gazing out over that wide expanse of country with



the ocean gleaming in the distance, and possibly miss many of the floral treasures at your feet. (29)

Similarly, Priskin observes that ‘wildflower appreciation requires walking in close proximity to plants, as numerous species require one to be less than one metre away for clear observation’ (518). Indeed, R Hobbs and Angus Hopkins argue that wildflower tourism has the potential to promote biodiversity conservation, threatened by habitat loss, native flora clearing, and over-harvesting (93-114). However, the embodied elements of wildflower appreciation, to include flora as a whole rather than flowers in isolation, require development in the region in order to achieve the long-term benefits suggested by Hobbs and Hopkins.



**Figure 1** (top) the orchid effect and **Figure 2** (bottom) the everlasting effect (photos by the author)

In historical and contemporary contexts, the aesthetic values of wildflower tourism have been presented to indicate its visual inclinations. Anthoethnography offers the potential to highlight new directions for wildflower tourism towards embodied botanical appreciation. This new concept and methodology of researching the culture of flora in the Southwest aims to reveal perceptual attitudes towards flowering plants during the spring wildflower season, including visual appreciation, embodied participation and objective values. To begin with, interviews conducted in the field with proprietors of tourism venues reveal two pre-eminent modes of viewing Southwest wildflowers and flowering landscapes in general. I describe these two distinct modes of perceiving plants as the ‘orchid effect’ and the ‘everlasting effect.’ The orchid effect requires proximal perception and the willingness to get close to the bush by bending down and physically interacting with plants. In contrast, the everlasting effect promotes detached visual appreciation (Ryan 545-546; Figures 1 and 2).

Merle Bennett, local botanist and coordinator of the Ravensthorpe Wildflower Show near Esperance, suggests that the everlasting effect is unrepresentative of the character of the southern Southwest landscape:

You sometimes see mass flowering of *Leptospermums* or something of that sort [like] *Kunzeas* at the side of the road. But on the whole, you don’t get these great masses of one thing flowering. You do in scattered areas but not to the same extent as the everlastings up north. (4)

Although the everlasting effect is the most panoramic, the orchid effect holds more biodiversity and requires proximity

between vegetative and human bodies during appreciative moments. Even at the apex of flowering, Fitzgerald River National Park outside of Ravensthorpe, perceived from a car, may appear drab green and uninviting. The everlasting effect comprises panoramic visualism and encourages disembodied viewership. It evokes theories of the imperial gaze of colonial explorers described by Paul Carter (xx-xxii) and other post-colonial scholars. Carter argues, however, that the imperial gaze of the explorer is 'phenomenological in nature. It is grounded, that is, in his recognition that he, the observer, does not gaze on the world as through a window, but rather inhabits it' (82). Unlike Carter's concept of phenomenological observation, the aesthetic gaze of the everlasting effect implies no inhabitation of a habitat. It supports a detached mode of spectatorship rather than the bodily immersion of Indigenous peoples' being in country. In contrast to the everlasting effect, the orchid effect makes appreciation possible through curiosity, attention and close physical engagement, diminishing the ordering powers of visual objectification by invoking the participatory senses. A comprehensive form of appreciation would shift between everlasting and orchid modes of perception: from seeing and gazing to feeling and tasting the land.

Anthoethnographic enquiry further elucidates some of the dynamics between objective science and appreciation of plants through visual and embodied modes. The Lesueur-Eneabba area north of Perth comprises particularly rich heathland environments (Hopkins, Keighery, and Marchant). Although the species diversity of the area results in year-round blossoming, flowering is most prolific during the spring

months August and October (Priskin 504). In the view of Allan Tinker, tour leader and proprietor of Western Flora Caravan Park in Eneabba, the effects of using scientific understanding to broaden surface-oriented visual aesthetic judgements are enduring:

My opinion is that if people know a little bit more about the reality of the system around them, they'll have a little more respect. And it pays off. We have a lot of people who come back who started off just going to look at the pretty wildflowers and come back a couple years later and say "I saw one of those over the road. I used to dump my rubbish over there. Now, we don't do that anymore because we know there are things there." So it does have an impression. (1)

For Tinker, the visual perception of plants entails limited appreciation of the scientific importance of flora. At Western Flora Caravan Park, botanical knowledge underscores the appearance of wildflowers as pretty or attractive. Tinker goes on to claim that engagement, as either visual aesthetics or participatory appreciation, interferes with the attainment of sound scientific comprehension of the role of flowering plants in ecological systems:

Our human appreciation is either aesthetic or edible. It's the aesthetic beauty or whether it can be consumed. So that's the major human perception of the plant. And so we forget that the only reason a plant has a flower is for its own reproduction. (6-7)

Instead of sight-based or embodied relationships, Tinker uses a Western scientific epistemology to instil in visitors a conservation ethos towards wildflowers. Although he formerly included information in his presentations to tourists about the palatability of certain species, such as the edible tubers of orchids, Tinker now

describes himself as ‘far more cautious...I very seldom talk about the edible side of the plant communities’ (6). He largely limits discussions to technical information about the adaptations of plants in order to promote their conservation in the Lesueur-Eneabba area.

Rather than setting up a binary opposition between vision and embodiment, participatory engagements based in bodily interaction can work dynamically with objective knowledges towards comprehensive forms of appreciation. In conjunction with technical understandings, Aboriginal spiritualities and material relationships to plants prompt directions for regional botanical appreciation. As described by Nyoongar/Injabarndi elder Dr. Noel Nannup, Aboriginal conceptions of flora are broader than the wildflower itself and encompass traditions between people and plants. The aesthetic experience of flora can be deepened through educating wildflower tourists about Aboriginal understandings of flora as foods, medicines, fibres, and totems, rather than visual items alone:

If you look at [a plant] aesthetically, it’s very pleasing. But if you can add that new dimension to it or add a dimension to it where you talk about the use of it as a plant you could make string out of, how it was poisonous or how you used it as food or medicine or whatever, then suddenly there’s a whole different thing. (4)

Nannup suggests the conservation of native plants, but in different terms to Tinker. Whereas botanical science instils a conservation ethic for Tinker, the Aboriginal spiritual relationships presented by Nannup foster a concern for the long-term wellbeing of plants and people through the concept of totems:

You’re also bringing in Aboriginal spirituality which is connected to [the appreciation of plants] because these plants we’re talking about are all totems. In the old way they were someone’s plant. (4)

Through a framework of spirituality and physical interaction linked to cultural heritage, Nannup encourages the deepening of the appreciation of wildflowers as linked to the health of people. His statements promote the interconnectedness between plants, habitats and people, rather than the isolation of images as the aesthetic outputs of wildflower tourism:

And as [Aboriginal people] looked after [their totems], they had to know everything that is possible to know about that plant. That’s what a totem is. You know [the totem] intimately. So you know the relationship it has with other plants, animals, birds, even what pollinates it. (4)

Intimacy between people and plants results from knowledge of ecological connections and the participation of appreciators in living habitats. Hence spirituality, embodiment and ecological knowledge are dialogic rather than in conflict. Whereas Tinker exclusively encourages the meta-narrative of science, Nannup holds that multi-layered experience of flora occurs through a sense of connectivity between bodies. The surface qualities of wildflowers such as colour and form are networked to the broader environment of the flower and to human cultural legacies. Nannup’s sense for comprehensive botanical appreciation offers a glimpse of the potential directions for wildflower tourism as it is presently practiced in the region.

## CONCLUSION

How does anthoethnography contribute to the development of understandings of aesthetic experiences of wild plants and wildflower tourism? As exemplified by the quintessentially aesthetic industry of wildflower tourism, the culture of flora represents diverse engagements between people and plants. Such complex engagements offer further avenues for research. The critical methodology of anthoethnography has been one such approach to circumscribing the values, practices and rhetoric of wildflower tourism. Interviews have revealed perceptual phenomena such as the orchid and everlasting effects as two counterpoised examples of the differences between visual aesthetic values occurring in the region. For appreciators such as Tinker, botanical science substantiates visual experience by showing the functional role of plants within habitats. However, the taxonomic eye is not the only judge of the value and significance of flowering plants. As underscored by Nannup, Aboriginal perspectives offer complex cultural modes of engagement and rich directions for wildflower tourism based in bodily experience.

An anthoethnographic approach produces accounts of the spectrum of human perceptions of wildflowers in order to proffer potential directions for wildflower tourism of the future. Through a participatory aesthetics of flora in contemporary Australian landscapes, appreciative interactions with plants will occur not only through visual values, but also through the smell, taste, sound, or feel of plants and how one moves through communities of flora. Scientific knowledge can amplify visual and embodied modes. However, as an anthoethnographic lens has

shown, wildflower tourism in the Southwest is weighted towards visual experience. Indeed, the history and contemporary practices of wildflower tourism encode ocular values that can posit a separation between post-colonial cultures and native flora. A promising direction is towards participatory relationships beyond the aestheticisation of the surface qualities of flora and beyond the 'conquest of the world as picture' (Heidegger 221). In an era of rapid species loss, wildflower tourism will increasingly embrace concepts of conservation, Aboriginal knowledges and the recognition of spiritual heritages, and the appreciation of plants beyond their visual impact. The expression of human sensory capacities for plants joined to an ethos of botanical conservation, drawing from scientific thought, can better ensure the longevity of flowers through the evolution of the culture of flora in the region.

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John Ryan is in his final year of his PhD dissertation in the School of Communications and Arts at Edith Cowan University in Perth. Titled *Plants, People and Place: Cultural Botany and the Southwest Australian Flora*, his doctoral project has examined a diverse range of cultural and literary resources pertaining to the diverse flora of the Southwest of Western Australia. Some of his dissertation chapters have been published in the journals *Australian Humanities Review* (2009), *Continuum* (2010), and *Nature and*

*Culture* (2011 forthcoming). He also has recently published a poetry chapbook called *Katoomba Incantation* (2011). His research interests include ecocriticism, arts-based methods of research into ecology, and the history of botany.

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